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ABSTRACT

Intended for counselors, the paper discusses some of the critical periods and patterns of gifted child development that relate to career and life style determination. Case histories of two gifted and talented students are offered, following their lives from early childhood through early adulthood. Maslow's need hierarchy (focusing on the elements of security, acceptance, esteem, and actualization) is used as a framework for understanding these two case histories. Twelve critical issues with regard to the development of gifted and talented children are outlined, including the fact that talented people are likely to look for a career as their principal means of self expression, that they experience conflict between achieving excellence and being accepted as normal, and that many gifted women still perceive marriage and career as mutually exclusive and make unnecessary compromises in career planning. Some general career guidance needs of the gifted are discussed and summarized. (DLS)

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The Career Development Needs of Talented Students: A Perspective for Counselors

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The Guidance Institute for Talented Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been providing model guidance services for gifted high school students since 1957 and in the last two years the Institute has implemented programs at the elementary and middle school levels. Most of the ideas set forth in this paper are the result of communicating with and longitudinally studying gifted high school students into adulthood - some of whom are now in their thirties.

Several definitions of talent exist. We subscribe to a definition whereby a child demonstrates skills significantly more developed than his or her peers. This could be interpreted to mean the child reads and possibly performs mathematical functions two or more grade levels in advance of peers, or it could mean scoring two or more standard deviations above the mean of classmates on some nationally normed measure. Talent can also be described in terms of exceptionality in social-leadership activities, divergent thinking/creativity, and physical skills. Talent in the creative or performing arts is often viewed as encompassing skills from many areas. We further assume some form of <u>special</u> programming is required for children whose abilities or needs exceed the resources of the classroom, the teacher and the school building.

Talented children have special career guidance needs due in part to their accelerated development and in part to the intensity with which their needs are manifested. Hoyt (1978) has outlined a few of the career development problems experienced by gifted students.

1. They have less need to consider scholastic aptitudes in making career decisions.
2. Career choices will be based more on interests and values which require a wider range of experiences than are usually part of the school curriculum.

3. Persons with special talents (e.g., music) who wish to pursue these talents occupationally often must begin developing them at an early age. This early commitment can inhibit life-style exploration and the development of a personal value system.
4. There may be a shortage of appropriate role models available.

School counselors have the opportunity to observe these problems and often possess the training, skills and resources necessary to intervene successfully. The purpose of this article is to assist counselors by presenting some of the critical periods and patterns of gifted child development that relate to career and life-style determination.

Talented Persons--Case Illustrations

In the first year or two of school, it is likely that talented children will get along well with teachers and peers because their accelerated development requires relatively little special attention or instructional resources beyond what is available. However, as they progress through the grades their differential rate of development is likely to make them think, perceive and behave less like their peers. By grades 3 through 5, talented students often need to draw upon a larger universe of ideas and people than is usually available in the classroom. The result is that some talented pupils may begin to assert themselves and make greater demands upon teacher's time than age-mates who are still relatively deferent and obedient, while others conform to the norm and deny their capabilities. It is important that these students learn in ways appropriate to their "development" rather than their chronological years.

Meeting advanced developmental needs is further compounded in grades 5 through 8 where talented students are moving more rapidly toward independent behavior than their peers. Their independence may prove odious to

parents and teachers and be sufficiently misguided so as to offend peers as well. By this time talented students may have worked through psychologically separating themselves from parents and begun establishing a personal value structure. Meanwhile, age-mates are working on the mutual aspects of separation, (Havighurst, 1979). If the talented student strives to maintain adult approval, problems often arise with peers. If peer approval is valued, trouble may arise within self as well as with adults.

By high school many talented students may have developed a personal value structure and want to direct their own development, an occurrence which teachers and parents may have trouble accepting (Kohlberg, 1979; Loevinger, 1970). Self-directed students need less external direction and stimulation and more opportunities to pursue self-motivated learning.

Talented Persons--Case Illustrations

Two case studies which follow represent nearly 30 years in the lives of two talented participants in the Guidance Institute. Following these case studies attention is focused on particular aspects of Connie's and John's giftedness relative to their career development. In this way we can better demonstrate some of the unique career development concerns of gifted persons. These condensed case studies were developed from data collected during four years of participating in the Institute program (grades 9-12) and followup questionnaires and interviews since high school, spanning a period of approximately fourteen years. Both case studies have been reviewed and approved by Connie and John respectively.

CONNIE

Early Childhood and Elementary School

Connie recalls getting along well with her sisters and brother. She was the oldest in the family followed by two sisters and a brother. She

states that it was hard being the oldest because "she was expected to do everything well." She remembers herself as a "deliberate type" instead of impulsive. In early childhood she had a friend that made her feel "second best." Connie states "I always compared myself to her."

She remembers her father not trusting her, often asking what she was doing. Her mother "defended us kids" and seems to have been closer to Connie. In a 10th grade essay Connie writes, "I never was too close to my father, and so my mom has been extra close." Her family was not a "talking family" and Connie remembers keeping many things to herself.

School did not seem much of a problem for her. She had no trouble reading and "liked books right away." She recognized in these early school years that she was not one of the "dummies" but did not see herself as a top student. She consistently received good report cards and this pleased her parents. She recalls that 5th grade was her first realization that she was "bright." School was very enjoyable but she recalls an incident in 3rd grade where the teacher "didn't like me because I was left-handed." What seems to stand out most about this is that her father "stuck up" for her and it felt good to get so much support from her dad.

Junior High School

Connie did not have to change schools. She attended the same school for 11 years. The most striking memory she has of this period is that in 8th grade she received all A's. "This was really exciting. It was just the kind of recognition I needed." This seemed to be an "awakening" for a firmer realization of her abilities. During these years she got along very well with others.

High School

In high school she had the reputation for being very studious. Her many school activities included; Student Council Secretary, Co-editor of the school newspaper, Girls Athletic Club and Pep Club.

There was a shortage of money in her family so in addition to her schoolwork and activities, she also held two jobs. At one point she remembers working so hard that she became physically ill. However, being busy and active was a way of life for her. "I like being busy, I thrive on it." In early childhood she was the "deliberate type" and this trait seems to have developed into doing tasks in a very organized manner. Her abilities to do many things at once seemed to stem from the fact that she knew how to organize her energies.

Connie also remembers her high school years as a time of pushing herself to achieve. External approval and recognition seemed very important. "I was measuring myself on other people's standards. It seems like getting the A was all important." She wishes that at this time in her life someone would have told her to relax. She had many girl friends in high school but claimed she had little social life with boys. "I think I scared them off--probably because of my high grades and drive for achievement." Interwoven with a striving to do excellent work was a recognition on her part that she needed a scholarship for college. She recognized that her family was not in a position to pay for her higher education. One of her end goals was to earn a scholarship, which she did.

Connie believes that while in high school she was insecure about her abilities. "My success was from hard work and not native ability." However, the activities at the Institute helped her gain confidence and appreciate

herself more. The personal essays gave her a chance to express a personal side of her, while her excellent scores on the verbal and math tests provided evidence to her that she did have "ability."

Her personal essays indicate optimism about life. She writes, "I have faith in the future, for the future brings along so many wonderful experiences and the possible fulfillment of so many dreams." She also writes, "I love life and am doing my best to make the most of it. Sometimes even I wonder where I get the energy. There's nothing I really dislike doing."

In her senior year the Institute counselor described her as, "highly motivated, striving to excell not only in the competitive sense, but for her own personal satisfaction." Connie expressed concern over what field to pursue after high school. With the ability to do so many things well, she found it difficult to narrow the choice. She wrote, "The field of chemistry sounds so interesting but so are many other fields--I'm becoming more and more confused about what I want to do." The importance of her future left Connie with some misgivings about making the "right" choice. Connie decided to begin college in Liberal Studies so she could continue to explore.

College

Connie received scholarship help to attend college. Connie was active in college especially after the first year. Scholastically she graduated with a 3.65 in a 4.0 system and was elected to Phi Kappa Phi honor society. She married in her senior year and both she and her husband enjoyed their studies. As she states, the discovery of being loved opened her to even more of the world and herself.

Post College

After college Connie and her husband moved to Chicago where her husband pursued studies in theology and she took a job doing secretarial work. This

was an unhappy time for her. Her job did not require her to use her talents, nor did it demand enthusiasm.

Present

Connie is presently a second grade teacher. She views herself as a very enthusiastic and dedicated teacher. Connie sees teaching as more than a job but as a lifestyle. She states "teaching is my vocation." It seems teaching has opened an array of discoveries about herself and her abilities. One such discovery has been a realization of creative talent. "I remember myself as a child who at the end of art period had a blank paper in front of me." Encouragement from her husband and simply the opportunity to teach have helped Connie test herself. One of her accomplishments has been her excellent "artwork" in decorating her classroom.

She has been married several years but has not felt ready for children. She has not wanted children because she has felt she needed more for herself first. "I did not want to apply my needs to my children." "Wanting a baby means I feel good." She believes her life is now much closer to including children.

Connie sees herself as gaining more self-confidence and that her life now can be more accurately described as guided by her "internal standards" rather than trying to live up to "standards of others." The need for external evaluation is less significant. She has developed her own system of self-evaluation. "I know when I'm doing a good job." "I feel I can solve problems if I have some."

JOHN

Early Childhood

John remembers himself as a very verbal child. He would hear jokes or stories and could remember and pass them on. The family enjoyed the stories

and John enjoyed the attention. He also had a very active imagination - making up stories to himself. He had vivid images of whatever he would make up. He did not share these fantasies with others as he realized they were fantasies and private. His father taught John much about nature and appreciation of the environment. His mother took the kids to museums, concerts, and numerous other cultural events. John also remembers being allowed a lot of freedom in his life. He got along well with his siblings and had a very stable home environment. His parents did not overly praise or reward him for good grades. John remembers that sometimes he wanted more attention for good grades than he was given.

Elementary School

John was always a top student and remained in the top reading groups through elementary school. He was conscious of competing with others and recognized who the best kids were academically and only compared himself with them. He was always curious, reading a lot of science and science fiction. He enjoyed music and going to the junior high school for band rehearsals with the older kids.

While in school he never regarded himself as an "egghead," nor did other kids. Usually when teachers would ask the class a question he would not get called on since it was assumed he knew the answer--sometimes he would answer anyway. He wanted others to realize that he knew his stuff, and remembers feeling some arrogance about his intellectual abilities. He hated to give the wrong answer and disliked being second in anything. His favorite subject in elementary school was science, and he remembers having very bad handwriting.

Junior High School (7-9)

He enjoyed changing teachers for each class. He did some reading on his own but it does not seem he had to work particularly hard to do well. Projects and assignments were done at the last minute--but successfully. Socially he was on the boundary of the popular group in grades 7-8. In 9th grade he was elected President of the Student Council. John remembers himself as more of a loner in 9th grade.

High School (10-12)

Among his many high school activities were President of the Student Council, Debate, National Honor Society, football, swimming, and playing the French horn in the band. The hobby he most remembers is stamp collecting which he continued through high school and still maintains. Most of his reading was for pleasure. His favorite subjects were chemistry, physics and math, and the most stimulating teachers were in science. He particularly recalls an excellent chemistry teacher and credits this role model as a factor in starting his own college career in chemistry.

He had a clear sense of being among the more intellectual students. This group formed a unique camaraderie and in his words, "We were highly skilled and inventive hell-raisers." He was not in the inner core of the popularity group and wanted to be but only on his terms. He did not want to drink and refused to succumb to peer pressure on this issue. He spent most of his time with his girl friend. He remembers tinges of loneliness during these years.

John recalls his high school years as pretty narrow in terms of thinking about careers or thinking about his own interests. He remembers being tracked into science and math because he was always strong in these areas. The

guidance department did nothing for him in helping him explore career opportunities other than science. He "decided" to enter chemistry with little thought other than the fact he was good in this area and chemistry was a status field to enter. Since science was interesting in high schol, he assumed it would be the same in college.

College and Seminary

John dropped chemistry as his major in the first semester. He felt it was too narrow a field and was not worth all of his time and effort. He found his interests were more towards people and in subjects other than science. He switched to general humanities and finished with a B.A. in history. He was more interested in broad human contact and began to think about which subjects would get him to this career goal. His college career was successful and his "most enjoyable years." He ended with a 3.94 GPA on a 4.0 system. He was active in many organizations and honor societies.

John next attended a school of Theology. John found in the seminary that there was a split between the intellectuals (he counted himself in this group) and those that were "people oriented." It seemed the atmosphere was that you could not care about people and work with people and pursue an intellectual career at the same time. During his seminary internship he was supervised by a minister who exemplified the combination of intellect and service. This model helped bring together for John much of what he wanted in a life's work--intellectual pursuit and service to people.

Currently

John is now married and a minister in Wisconsin. He is characterized by himself and his colleagues as the "intellectual" on the staff. He is also the advisor for the youth and university students. What is extremely

important for John is maintaining a breadth of intellectual and people oriented activities. He is his own critic in his work. He continues to make use of imagery, as he thinks about the church and other areas in images.

In reflecting about career development John writes, "I think that the most significant factor for me has been encounters with personal models of involved lives--people who have exhibited both intellectual and personal-ethical commitments in integrating and sustaining joyful life patterns." When talking about his vocation as a minister, he definitely sees it as a way of life and not an occupational role. He has much of his life vested in the ministry. As he says, about the ministry, "It is a dimension of my self-identity, though not the sole shaper of my identity. I feel that I have been able to shape my career to fit my personal life style."

John presently thinks much about his career. While he feels satisfied, he is thinking of how to improve himself and about further schooling in theology, perhaps to eventually do some teaching in the field. "My work is extremely satisfying, challenging and provides the opportunity for continual learning and development.

Differential Development

Maslow's (1970) need hierarchy (security → acceptance → esteem → actualization) provides one framework for understanding Connie and John at different times in their lives. During her childhood years, Connie appeared to be developing more out of the security orientation due to limited financial resources and conflict in her family. Once the security issues were resolved she moved into the acceptance orientation during her junior high school years. The esteem orientation began to appear during her late high

school and early college years. Connie is presently beginning to enter the self-actualized orientation. Her progress through the four levels differs markedly from John's who progressed at a much faster rate. The security and acceptance John received early in life enabled him to achieve some measure of esteem as early as elementary school. From there it was a matter of testing limits and refining concepts to where John entered the self-actualized orientation during his college years.

These two case studies are representative of the many gifted individuals who have participated in Institute Programs. Using these representative case studies, our conceptualization of the critical issues facing the talented follow. While some of these issues are not unique to the talented, we do feel that they do present some unique career guidance concerns because they appear consistantly often in particularly debilitating combinations.

Critical Issues

1. An "anything is possible" attitude leaves talented individuals with the notion that anything they aspire to is attainable. It is difficult for many talented students to acknowledge their weaknesses and any evidence of personal limitation is ignored or rejected.
2. Talented persons may receive a great deal of positive reinforcement from others for most every endeavor, finding it difficult to sort out what they value from what others value for them. In attempting to bring order and set priorities they adopt the value system of the most powerful or influential person in their life. Moreover, they identify with "powerful" role models which may make it hard to "measure up."

3. Teachers, parents and peers can often have high expectations for talented students. The student can perceive these high expectations as impossibly high and develop fear of failure or avoidance of success behavior patterns which avoids testing their true competency. These avoidance patterns which stifle creative learning and appropriate risk taking can inhibit personal development.
4. There is tendency to commit themselves to career choices prematurely based upon subject matter fields in which they achieve considerable recognition and success. The academically talented frequently become lifelong students because the role of student is so comfortable and recognition by others is so readily attainable.
5. Talented are likely to look for a career as their principal means of self-expression.
6. The talented experience conflict between achieving excellence and being accepted as normal.
7. Talented may have a greater need for mastery and thoroughness than others. The need may become translated in fixating on detail at the expense of obtaining a good gestalt.
8. Due to the extended years of education required to prepare for entering a profession, development of certain psycho-social needs of the talented may be severely delayed. For example, extended preparation for career entry extends the dependence-independence conflict within the family.
9. The extended time it takes to prepare for entry into a profession increases the likelihood that significant changes have occurred in both the work itself and in the individual at the point of occupational entry.

10. Many gifted women still perceive marriage and career as mutually exclusive and make unnecessary compromises in career planning.
11. Gifted and talented being relative terms, individuals will need to re-define themselves within each new context and each new peer group thus adjusting or adapting their self concepts accordingly.
12. The gifted are usually told "you can be anything you want" which somewhat negates and denies what and who they already are, placing them on a treadmill of continually becoming something beyond their immediate selves.

Career Guidance Needs of Gifted

Self Awareness:

Typically children learn a great deal about themselves from their peers. Gifted pupils may learn from their peers that they are different but being different may not be perceived positively. At this time the process of socialization begins. If a talented child is to develop maximally, then the counselor needs to both be aware of those elements which will hinder development and take action to minimize their impact. This is especially true for talented women as noted by Fox and Richmond (1979), "Counseling activities, particularly for careers, should take place early in preadolescent years before gifted young women become socialized against the full development of their abilities" (p. 259). In addition to counselors being concerned about fostering a positive self-attitude, the elementary school counselor may have to help locate mentors and tutors and other resource persons for the gifted pupil and help the school provide unique learning opportunities for individual or small numbers of gifted pupils.

The young child's imagination should be nurtured in order to help the child maintain an open perspective and avoid becoming too narrow or rigid in his/her thinking. In turn, permitting or even encouraging divergent thinking and teaching creative behavior could become a responsibility of the counselor. If the gifted are to help solve social problems, they are going to have to use their acquired knowledge as well as their imaginations. Teaching creative thinking and behavior and problem solving is certainly within the counselor's capability.

As talented pupils move through school excelling in certain areas, counselors may have to help these students develop peer relations. As part of decision-making, particular emphasis should be placed on teaching gifted students to apply time-management assessment techniques to themselves as they are frequently "spread too thin." Value clarification and development of a personal philosophy is essential if the gifted individual is going to become socially aware, identify personally meaningful life goals, develop a career plan and assume responsibility for implementing this career plan.

Talented students often have a limited view of their skills and competencies due to the consistently positive feedback they receive. Counselors can be of great help to the student and his/her teacher by facilitating more comprehensive feedback which addresses the talented students current level of accelerated development. Many talented high school students lose respect for the education process, primarily because the feedback they receive is innocuously positive, vague, and simplistic.

Social Awareness-Action Orientation:

Current and anticipated social problems and concerns as well as the means to attack these problems could be part of an experiential curriculum

provided by the guidance staff. In concert with the faculty, futuristic games, decision-making, and even study skills are areas in which gifted students may require special assistance. In fact, few gifted students know how to study which frequently becomes a handicap in college or professional school.

Talented being a relative term, students would benefit from learning to recognize that as peer referent groups change, the comparative uniqueness of the talented person changes. The label, talented, is really rooted in the educational system and as such the student should learn to accept changes in one's relative competencies the same way athletes must adjust their self concepts when competing at high school, college and professional levels.

Implementing a Career Plan:

Talented students often have a naive understanding of career development. For example, the belief in the "perfect job" places the career development process in very rigid hit or miss terms. Students believing this myth often conceptualize a job as a trap which of course inhibits active planning and action by the student. Counselors can be of great service by outlining career development skills and objectives in creative and dynamic terms which meet the realities of the modern work world.

Helping the talented individual understand that being a student is but one social role and that other roles will become increasingly important may be necessary. Social development is a dynamic concept and the passive dependent role of student must be exchanged for more proactive attitudes if individual development is to reach optimal levels. For example, proactive talented persons will more likely engage in divergent and creative thinking

and planning. Divergence also requires support and understanding. Counselors can provide for these needs while assisting the individual in formulating a career plan that will be personally meaningful and socially relevant.

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